

BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES FOR LANDSCAPE MAINTENANCE

During summer 2006 the National Mall & Memorial Parks undertook two studies to examine best landscape maintenance practices. One study analyzed maintenance practices at designed landscapes in Washington, D.C., and the other looked at management practices for heavily used landscapes in New York City, Chicago, San Francisco, Atlanta, London, Ottawa, and Canberra. The studies detail a number of lessons that are summarized here.

LOCAL BEST PRACTICES FOR MAINTAINING DESIGNED LANDSCAPES

The study of local designed landscapes found a correlation between attractive designed local landscapes and well-organized and trained groundskeeping departments that understood the designs' intention and were committed to fulfilling the intention in order to create places of beauty for visitors. These designed local landscapes also thoughtfully incorporated and integrated design details to establish a sense of place and/or an organizational identity, to better accommodate modern use patterns and intensities, to improve the security and public safety of visitors, to encourage positive visitor behavior, to conserve materials, and to ease maintenance practices.

- *Create a Sense of Place:* Coordinated site furnishings, graphic logos, color systems, signage, uniforms, and messages help create a sense of place.
- *Show that Quality Counts:* Use quality materials, details, and flowers to attract users and reinforce desired behavior.
- *Make It Clean and "Green":* Green, organic landscapes are often safer, cleaner, and healthier for everyone. Make sure the public knows your "green" goals.
- *Use Smart Design:* Make sure plants will grow and that they can be easily maintained.
- *Encourage Visitor Stewardship:* Build public support and encourage positive visitor behavior to make higher maintenance standards easier to achieve. Involve the public in activities such as planting, volunteering, and cleanup. Use prominently placed visitor rules of behavior to encourage desired and appropriate visitor conduct.
- *Manage Events:* Assign events to areas that are in good condition or that can better absorb impacts, and allow other areas to be restored or renovated. Design infrastructure to meet event needs.
- *Provide Subtle but Effective Security and Safety Elements:* Low post-and-chain barriers, raised curbs, and groundcovers can redirect visitors to pathways and protect landscape areas.
- *Write Down Landscape Standards and Criteria:* Develop clear and understandable goals for maintenance staff.
- *Ensure that Staff Understand the Design Intent:* Maintenance staff need to know what an area is supposed to look like and why.
- *Maintain Proactively and Keep It Clean:* Use quick-response teams to save money by catching potential problems early when the team is not addressing immediate needs. Well-maintained and clean areas reinforce a higher standard of behavior.

- *Foster Staff Pride in a Job Well-Done:* Encourage staff to take pride in their work by making them responsible for certain areas and by holding them accountable for achieving results. Use peer inspections to improve performance.

NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL BEST PRACTICES FOR MAINTAINING HEAVILY USED LANDSCAPES

The purpose of this study is to synthesize use guidelines and best practices for achieving high standards of landscape maintenance despite heavy levels of use and the presence of major events in national capitals or other heavily used urban areas. The following are preliminary findings.

- *Use Collaborative Event Management:* Coordinate event and maintenance staff work onsite with event organizers, and provide oversight from setup through takedown. Co-locate events and maintenance to encourage communication and problem solving and to enforce event guidelines.
- *Design for Events:* Provide an appropriate mix of hard surfaces and turf, standardized utility hookups and event infrastructure, accessibility to public transportation, etc.
- *Strictly Enforce Maintenance Guidelines:* Manage the tension between landscape quality and demand for use through enforced rest periods, reasonable time limits that events cannot exceed, and mandatory backup plans in case of inclement weather. Adopt comprehensive event management guidelines.
- *Use Skilled Staff:* Recognize that event and maintenance employees have specialized skills. Ensure that they are knowledgeable in leading edge management practices. Outsource some tasks to focus on needed skills.
- *Foster User Education:* Take the time to help users understand regulations, limits, and condition goals. Use simple but not visually intrusive systems, such as flags, to identify areas closed for restoration. Train users to help enforce closures by telling people to stay out of the area.
- *Coordinate Site Furnishings and Information:* Coordinate place identity and landscape appearance through a hierarchy of design for site furniture and consistent groupings — benches, trash cans, information kiosks, light fixtures, and orientation signs.
- *Control Circulation Impacts:* Manage the movement of people to reduce social trails and damage to trees and turf by using techniques such as planting beds, cobblestone borders, raised curbs, placement of seating, mobile carts, and decorative or post-and-chain fencing.
- *Limit the Number, Size, Location, and Duration of Events.* Define user capacity for locations when there are multiple event venues, and suggest appropriate types of uses for each venue.
- *Identify Event Objectives and Core Values.* In a national capital consider giving priority to events that are national in scope or that promote an understanding of national culture, democratic principles, diversity, or identity.